

Defense Transformation *à la française* and U.S. Interests

by Leo G. Michel

Key Points

France has embarked on a transformation of its national security strategy, structures, capabilities, and relationships with Allies and other international partners. At its core, this transformation reflects a growing French consensus that globalization—especially the emergence of new, less predictable threats and vulnerabilities—has profoundly altered defense requirements since the last comprehensive review in the mid-1990s. But President Nicolas Sarkozy, faced with a large budget deficit, is determined to meet those requirements without near-term increases in defense spending.

The *White Book on Defense and National Security*, which Sarkozy commissioned in August 2007 and approved in June 2008, is designed to serve as the overall blueprint for the transformation process.¹ Supported by its analysis, Sarkozy has reiterated earlier high-profile policy shifts—his declared intent, for example, to see France “take its full place” in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—and ruled on some contentious investment and reform issues. Other pieces of the transformation puzzle, notably the new 5-year defense budget, depend on parliamentary approval.

Domestic reaction has been mixed. The White Book’s description of the global security environment and French strategic priorities has generated relatively little controversy. However, the reform package—in particular,

plans to consolidate basing structures and downsize the armed forces—has sparked serious criticism. Influential figures across the political spectrum have suggested, in effect, that the reforms will widen the gap between France’s defense and foreign policy ambitions and its limited capabilities.

At stake is more than the shape of France’s defense establishment. French policies, capabilities, and overseas commitments help to shape those of its European partners. Moreover, French influence remains consequential in regions beyond Europe, including parts of Africa. Thus, while the United States has limited ability to influence the French defense transformation, it has an important interest in the outcome.

“La grande nation” Still?

French President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged that France “will remain a great military power” when he unveiled the *White Book on Defense and National Security* and endorsed its wide-ranging reforms.² The next day, a group of anonymous general officers condemned it as an “amateurish” and “incoherent” exercise that “cannot mask the downgrading of our military in a more dangerous world,” and former conservative Prime Minister Alain Juppé criticized Sarkozy’s intention to enhance France’s role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a “fool’s bargain.”³

Behind such rhetorical volleys lies the complex, costly, and occasionally humbling

process of defense transformation *à la française*: the Sarkozy government’s attempt to refashion the strategy, structures, capabilities, and international engagements of the only European Ally, except for the United Kingdom, that aspires to be a global actor able to act independently, if needed, to promote or defend its interests.

Sarkozy launched the effort with ambitious terms of reference for the White Book: a prospective analysis, covering a 15-year horizon, of the international security environment and priority missions of French armed forces; a comprehensive strategy that emphasizes synergies between defense and nondefense structures and capabilities (such as economic and diplomatic tools) and between external operations and homeland defense; and recommendations on future force structure, equipment, financing, human resources, intelligence organization, and industrial and research policy.⁴

Moreover, the White Book was to be the product of a relatively transparent, inclusive, and bottom-up process—unlike the White Books of 1972 and 1994, which were essentially defense ministry products carefully guided by the president’s staff. To prepare the document, Sarkozy appointed a commission of some three dozen civil servants, military officers, parliamentarians and local elected officials (of the majority and opposition parties), and eminent representatives of civil society. He encouraged the commission to hold open hearings with French and international

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specialists and to solicit public input through an Internet forum.

In some respects, the White Book fell short of expectations. Sarkozy effectively preempted the commission process on a few contentious issues—notably nuclear weapons policy, France's future role in NATO, and whether to construct a second aircraft carrier. Some critics, including the aforementioned group of anonymous general officers, charged that the military's viewpoints were not sufficiently represented in the commission's work, although General Jean-Louis Georgelin, Chief of the Defense Staff and a commission member, asserted otherwise.

Still, the White Book placed on the table key questions facing the government and public that for too long had escaped critical analysis by all but a relatively small circle of officials and experts. The commission's open hearings, Internet forum, and spinoff meetings held by defense-oriented think tanks created an important record for journalists and researchers and served as a welcome supplement to closed-door meetings with parliamentarians and military leaders.

France's defense transformation is a work in progress. But based on the White Book, statements by government and military officials, and reactions from leading politicians and nongovernment analysts, a reasonably clear picture has emerged on three questions:

- How do the French assess the future strategic environment?
- How do they intend to adapt their strategy, capabilities, and international partnerships to deal with that environment?
- What are the implications for the United States?

Threat Perceptions

The threats of international terrorism, weapons proliferation, and deepening ties between state and nonstate actors—arrayed, according to the White Book, in an “arc of crisis from the Atlantic to [the]

Indian Ocean”—are at the top of French strategic concerns. Sarkozy has singled out terrorism as the “immediate threat” against France and called the Iranian “crisis”—referring to Iran's suspected program to acquire nuclear weapons—as the “leading threat weighing on the world today.”⁵ The White Book seems to go one step further, hinting at a possible cause-and-effect relationship between a potential war “in one of the zones of European strategic interest” and a catastrophic terrorist attack on European territory.⁶

But French strategic concerns do not stop there. The White Book also evokes the possibility of sudden and “devastating”

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state-on-state crises in Asia and warns of volatile, nonmilitary threats ranging from cyberattacks to pandemics, mass migration (exacerbated by climate change), and interruptions in energy supplies. And while the White Book does not suggest that Russia poses a direct security threat to France, Russia is said to be staging a return on the international stage, using a disquieting mix of its “energy weapon” and political and security leverage on its neighbors—an assessment that likely has hardened in the wake of the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008.

According to the White Book, nearly all of these security concerns devolve from, or are accentuated by, globalization. Moreover, they contribute to a blurring of past distinctions between external and internal security.

Indeed, French officials privately have acknowledged that one of the White Book's key messages for the public is that French territory, while safe from invasion, can be directly targeted by an array of state and nonstate actors. This is another change from the 1994 White Book, which focused on external military operations and paid scant attention to links between domestic security and external threats.

Strategic Themes

Not surprisingly, the country's national security interests, as defined by the White Book, follow classical lines in French strategic thinking: defending France's territory and population; assuring its contribution to European and international security; and protecting its democratic principles, such as individual liberty and human dignity. However, the White Book's concept of “national security strategy” is broader than previous government formulations, since it encompasses external security as well as internal security and advocates integration of military and nonmilitary means (such as diplomatic and economic tools) to confront “all risks and threats that can harm the nation's life.”

Like the White Book's threat assessment, neither the definition of national security interests nor the need for an integrated national security strategy has provoked serious domestic debate. Still, the White Book contains noteworthy shifts in strategic emphasis.

Foremost among these are the articulation and prioritization of five “strategic functions” necessary to respond to increasingly volatile and unpredictable crises. The “knowledge-anticipation” function—which covers a range of intelligence and other information-gathering, analysis, and forecasting activities—is to receive special priority, given its importance to all defense and national security-related decisionmaking, missions, and military, intelligence, and police services. The

White Book emphasizes that greater investment in, and more efficient organization of, the knowledge-anticipation function is critical to preserving French “autonomy”—a theme that appears repeatedly, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the document.

Two other strategic functions, “prevention” and “protection,” underscore the need for improved interagency and international coordination in the application of diplomatic, economic, financial, military, and rule of law capabilities across the spectrum of crisis management, including emergency response to manmade or natural threats to the French homeland.

The “intervention” function reflects an evolution in French thinking on the criteria for military action. As a rule, previous official statements regarding such criteria were cast in broad terms to give decisionmakers (above all, the president) the widest possible discretion. The White Book, however, offers somewhat more systematic criteria. For example:

- The document posits a clear demarcation between situations where unilateral military action is “plausible”—these are the protection of French citizens overseas, implementation of bilateral defense accords, and a specific, fast-breaking event “directed against [French] interests”—and “all other cases,” where French intervention will take place in a multilateral framework with “the legitimacy conferred by international law.”

- It states that, given the uncertain international environment, France must shape its defense structure keeping in mind that its engagement in a state-on-state conflict “can still be envisaged.” Thus, it rejects the notion of organizing French forces to perform only stabilization missions.

- The document also establishes seven criteria, or “directing principles,” to determine the legitimacy and effectiveness of a French military intervention. Some are unexceptional, such as the requirements to explore all other options before the use of force and, if force is necessary, to apply it within “respect for international legality.” Another, however, suggests that interventions need not be tied directly to the defense of French

“national interests.” And still another suggests that the “democratic legitimacy” of an intervention is just as important as its international legality.

Official statements on French nuclear doctrine traditionally have been opaque, and the White Book is no exception. Indeed, leading French strategists argue that “strategic ambiguity”—that is, an element of unpredictability in the French response—strengthens deterrence. The “dissuasion” function described by the White Book deals exclusively with nuclear weapons issues and tracks closely with Sarkozy’s earlier pronouncements.⁷ France’s nuclear deterrent remains the “ultimate guarantee of national security and independence” to be used for “strictly defensive” purposes. Consistent with past official declarations, the White Book affirms that to exercise deterrence and make clear its determination to safeguard “vital interests,” France will maintain the capability to “proceed to a nuclear warning.”

The White Book, however, does not tie the president’s hands. True, it appears at times to limit the application of deterrence—and, by extension, the possible use of nuclear weapons—to an act of aggression by another state. However, it does not specify that only a nuclear aggression would trigger a French nuclear response. Moreover, it also emphasizes the president’s responsibility to determine the “limits of [French] vital interests in a world that is constantly changing and where there will be many attempts to go around our means of defense and security.” While ambiguous, the formulation hints that the president would enjoy a degree of flexibility in deciding whether to exercise a nuclear option in response to a catastrophic attack originating from the territory of another state but not necessarily sanctioned by the latter’s government.

Acting Alone or with Others?

A longstanding tenet of France’s defense policy has been that it must maintain the capability to act alone if its bilateral agreements or vital interests should so dictate.

However, the practical as well as political limits on military operations taken in a “national framework” (that is, unilaterally) have narrowed over the past decade. That the White Book would deal carefully with this inconvenient truth comes as no surprise, given the strong attachment of the French

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polity to the notion of “independence.” Indeed, the document suggests that *increasing* French “freedom of action” is a core objective of military strategy.

Nevertheless, the White Book strongly implies that, in practice, French military operations undertaken on a national basis would henceforth be limited to “special” operations (for example, to free hostages or pursue terrorists) and “middle-scale” operations (evacuation of nationals in a nonpermissive environment). “Significant” operations (peacekeeping or peace enforcement) would be undertaken either in a bilateral or multinational framework, and “major” operations (high-intensity joint and combined warfare taking place at considerable distance from France) would necessarily take place as part of an alliance or coalition. In the latter case, the White Book further specifies that France must be able to serve as a “framework nation”—that is, capable of commanding a joint and combined force; lead any one of its components (land, air, maritime, special forces); and be among the “first entry” forces.

In this context, the White Book specifies that France must be capable of *simultaneous* deployment of the following forces:

- A force of some 30,000 soldiers, able to be deployed in 6 months and sustained for 1 year, for operations ranging from several “lesser included” contingencies (such

as limited stabilization or peacekeeping operations) to an extended stabilization mission or a major regional conflict. While this is a reduction from the existing “operational contract” of 50,000 soldiers, which French officials have acknowledged is unrealistic, the new target nevertheless represents approximately twice the number of French military currently deployed on overseas operations.

- A force of some 5,000 soldiers for “autonomous” quick reaction in a separate theater, with another force of up to 10,000 soldiers to respond, in support of civilian agencies, to an emergency on French territory. The latter, in particular, would represent a sizeable expansion of existing capabilities.⁸
- An air component of some 70 combat aircraft capable of a “high” operational tempo during initial stages of a major conflict and a “sustained” tempo during a stabilization phase, with some 10 combat aircraft available for a rapid and “autonomous” (that is, national or French-led) external operation.
- An aircraft carrier task group (with aircraft, escort ships, and nuclear submarines) and one or two amphibious or maritime security groups available for various force projection missions.⁹

European Union and NATO

Considerations. In the event of a “major” operation, the French appear to prefer working with NATO and/or the United States rather than a European Union (EU) framework. For “significant” operations, either a NATO or an EU framework might be preferred, depending on the political and military context at hand. The White Book eschews a neat division of labor between NATO-led and EU-led military operations, perhaps reflecting concerns within the defense establishment regarding the level of ambition attributed to the EU’s European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) by their civilian leadership.

On one hand, the White Book suggests rejuvenating the EU’s “Helsinki headline goal” agreed to in 1999, that is, the capability to deploy up to 50,000 to 60,000 military to a distant theater within 60 days, along with necessary air and maritime components,

and sustain them for at least a year in operations ranging from humanitarian and rescue to peacekeeping or separation of warring parties. The White Book also suggests that the EU should be able to simultaneously plan and conduct two to three peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions and several civilian ESDP operations in different theaters. Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, addressing an EU Presidency seminar on NATO–EU relations in July 2008, seemed to raise the bar even higher.¹⁰

On the other hand, these ambitious objectives for ESDP are coupled with a formidable list of EU capability shortfalls, including strategic and tactical air transport; refueling aircraft; common intelligence platforms (including space-based) and analysis capability; rapidly deployable nonmilitary personnel (such as police, judges, and border customs and logistics experts); and “autonomous” operational planning and command and control capabilities.

French officials have long hectored fellow EU members to significantly increase their defense spending, especially in investment and operational accounts, and frequently have carped at their unwillingness to do so. But over the past year, French military leaders also have become more outspoken regarding the serious strains on French and other EU members’ resources. For example, General Henri Bentégeat, former Chief of the Defense Staff and now chairman of the EU Military Committee, acknowledged in December 2007 that in terms of European forces available for overseas interventions, “We are close to the limit, not in theoretical capacity, but in acceptability by the public and financial responsibility.” And General Georgelin stated in May 2008, “We have a pressing obligation to build European defense, but make no mistake, it will involve more costs than savings for a long time to come.”¹¹

A growing appreciation for the limits of ESDP likely has reinforced Sarkozy’s moves toward rapprochement with NATO, which eventually would include boosting France’s relatively limited participation in its military structures.¹² His principal motivation is said to be political in nature: to reinforce the transatlantic links—and

especially bilateral relations between France and the United States—that were badly stressed over the invasion of Iraq; and to garner greater support among European Allies for the French vision of ESDP.

French proponents of a closer relationship with NATO have long bemoaned their public’s limited understanding of how the Alliance works and France’s role within its structures, but they have begun working to correct that problem. The White Book offers the most comprehensive official exposition to date of the strategic rationale for Sarkozy’s policy shift toward NATO. Describing NATO as “essential to French security,” the White Book emphasizes that the Alliance has transformed itself over the past 15 years, permitting France to steadily increase its participation in civilian and military structures as well as force generation for NATO-led operations and the NATO Response Force (NRF).

the Alliance has transformed itself over the past 15 years, permitting France to steadily increase its participation in civilian and military structures

without encumbering sovereign control of its military forces. The White Book also emphasizes the complementary relationship between NATO and ESDP and acknowledges, in effect, that France’s limited participation in NATO military structures does not enhance its stature or influence with the other 20 EU member states that belong to NATO and participate fully in those structures.

Although the White Book does not explicitly recommend a course of action—according to press reports, a few commission members disagreed on the NATO issue—it notes that French “engagement in NATO has no *a priori* limit, provided there are safeguards for the independence of [French] nuclear forces, freedom of opinion for [French] authorities and freedom of decision regarding engagement of [French]

forces.” And to counter conservative and leftist critics who argue that a French “return” to NATO would constitute an unacceptable “alignment” with U.S. policies, Sarkozy has reminded the public that “[t]his alliance between Europeans and the United States is also—this is not said enough—an alliance among the European nations.”¹³

Some French military officers have speculated privately on pragmatic advantages of their increased participation in NATO structures. These include the possibilities of exercising operational command of an EU mission conducted under NATO–EU “Berlin Plus” arrangements, a role reserved for the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR); and operational command of an NRF mission, a role currently reserved for a commander of NATO’s joint force commands in Brunssum and Naples and joint command in Lisbon. Some advisors also apparently believe that increased French participation in NATO’s operational and defense planning structures would enhance interoperability with the U.S. and other allied militaries and afford greater French influence over the strategic direction of the Alliance. Moreover, given the overlapping NATO and EU membership, interoperability and capability improvements generated through NATO would benefit ESDP as well.¹⁴ The White Book does not discuss such considerations, however; nor have they been part of the public debate.

Indeed, French officials are inclined to play down the practical implications of full French participation in NATO structures, perhaps calculating that domestic resistance would be muted if the policy shift were perceived as more symbolic than substantive. Others grudgingly accept rapprochement with NATO as a potentially important political card but contest its practical value. One former French Permanent Representative to NATO recently told a parliamentary commission that while France should insist on top military posts, placing “600 French officers in NATO command structures, as mentioned in press reports, would be absurd.”¹⁵

Much will depend on how the Sarkozy government approaches detailed discussions on where, when, and at what level France might increase its presence in NATO structures. Among French opinion leaders, support for any

change likely will remain lukewarm, at best. This probably accounts, in part, for the differing emphasis in official statements on this subject. For example, Sarkozy spoke in seemingly

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definitive terms at NATO’s Bucharest Summit of “completing the transformation of the French role in NATO.”¹⁶ However, when unveiling the White Book, he reiterated previous statements suggesting that achieving important advances on ESDP during the French EU presidency (July through December 2008) is a precondition of movement on NATO. In the event Sarkozy cannot credibly claim an ESDP success at the end of the French EU presidency, his domestic critics will no doubt remind him of that precondition.

Moreover, in the wake of base closures and personnel reductions at home, the prospect of assigning up to several hundred officers and noncommissioned officers to NATO staff billets and increasing French contributions to the organization’s civilian and military budgets will be politically delicate, absent a more concerted effort to convince parliamentarians and other opinion leaders of the value-added—for intra-European and transatlantic cooperation—of such a move. While domestic factors will tend to push Paris to seek several prestigious flag officer posts in NATO, other Allies sympathetic to a greater French role—including France’s key European military partners, the United Kingdom and Germany—will be wary of French “overreaching.” One solution might be to adopt a phased approach, providing for a scheduled increase in French command responsibilities and a multiyear rotation arrangement for some key posts, such as the DSACEUR position traditionally held by a European flag officer.

Africa’s Significance. According to the White Book, Africa will remain a top strategic concern for France, especially as its many security challenges—from regional and ethnic conflicts to terrorist threats (particularly in the Sahel), drug trafficking, and mass dislocation of populations—have direct and indirect impact on French interests. The conditions of French military presence, however, are set to change. Bilateral agreements negotiated in the early postcolonial period, some of which contained confidential provisions for French intervention to maintain public order, will be scrapped; new agreements, based on a more cooperative partnership, will be negotiated and, for the first time, submitted to the French parliament for approval.

The White Book also foresees an adjustment of French “prepositioned” military forces in Africa, where France currently stations some 4,900 personnel under bilateral agreements with three countries—Djibouti, Senegal, and Gabon. (As of July 2008, another 5,000 personnel were engaged in operations in Africa, principally in Côte d’Ivoire, under United Nations auspices, and Chad, under separate bilateral and EU auspices.) Specifically, the prepositioned forces are to be reorganized around two “poles”—likely to be Djibouti and, possibly, Senegal—that will serve, in part, as support bases for expanded aerial and maritime surveillance activities in their respective regions. In addition, French military assistance, training, and cooperation activities in Africa are to be better integrated with other security sector reforms (involving police, gendarmerie, and judicial bodies) and increasingly embedded in regional partnerships (with organizations such as the African Union) and EU-led efforts.

Capabilities Conundrum

By far, the most intensely debated aspect of the defense reform effort involves its reprioritization of capabilities and associated allocation of resources.

In the course of the White Book’s preparation, complaints over shortfalls in needed capabilities and training were raised with unaccustomed candor. For example, in May 2008, a respected retired general

and land forces commander, Jean-Claude Thomann, blamed a “mediocre financial situation and pressures from aerospace, naval and nuclear lobbies” for systematically underfunding the army. “Today,” he wrote in a leading daily, “we have the least well-equipped ground units in the West, as our soldiers can attest when alongside their peers in Afghanistan.”¹⁷

The government, for its part, has not hidden important challenges in the area of capabilities. The White Book lists the high average ages of obsolescent major land, sea, and air platforms. Defense Minister Hervé Morin has complained openly about “worn out” equipment, inadequate training (“a Leclerc tank regiment operates its vehicles for an average of two hours a week”), and a defense manpower system that devotes 60 percent of its personnel to general administration or support functions and only 40 percent to operational forces.¹⁸

To correct capability gaps and position French forces to meet projected threats out to 2025, the White Book emphasizes the following:

■ *Intelligence/space.* A major effort will be made to expand and modernize French observation, communications, signals intelligence, and missile early-warning satellites, in cooperation with EU partners where possible. This will involve a doubling of annual national funding, now at 380 million euros, for this purpose, and the creation of a dedicated Joint Space Command (under air force management) to oversee space-related doctrine, operations, and programs.

■ *Nuclear deterrent.* The principal modernization programs for the maritime and aviation components of the nuclear force will be maintained; these include deployment, beginning in 2010, of a new submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile for France’s four ballistic missile submarines and, beginning in 2009, deployment of a new air-ground missile to be carried by Rafale and Mirage 2000 aircraft. Consistent with French declaratory policy of maintaining the nuclear force at a level of “strict sufficiency,” the aviation component will be reduced by one-third (from 60 to 40 aircraft). These moves will bring the total of nuclear warheads to fewer than 300. Simulation programs

(for weapons reliability and safety in the absence of nuclear explosive testing) and efforts to improve missile range and precision will be pursued. Although the White Book does not provide budget projections in this area, nuclear weapons programs currently represent approximately 20 percent of defense investments.

■ *Army.* Land forces will be configured for full-spectrum operations, capable of transitioning from “first entry” and high-intensity combat to stabilization missions. Modernization priorities will include force protection (for example, armored vehicles, anti-improvised explosive device equipment, and nuclear-chemical-biological-radiological defense) and additional mobility (for example, transport helicopters.) The French goal is to be capable of commanding a corps-size land component in a major operation and form the backbone of a reinforced NATO division (two or three French brigades plus one or two allied brigades). Over the next 6 to 7 years, however, army personnel will be reduced from 157,000 (including 26,000 civilians) to 131,000; the latter figure will include an “operations” pool of 88,000 soldiers.

■ *Air Force.* The air component will be modernized and downsized to consist of 300 Mirage 2000 and Rafale aircraft, including those dedicated to a nuclear role. Other modernization priorities will include some 70 A400M strategic transporters (deliveries are projected to begin in 2010–2011), some 14 refueling aircraft, and 4 airborne warning and control aircraft. The air force is to be capable of commanding a joint forces air component command and projecting a 1,500-man force, with associated equipment, up to 8,000 kilometers within 5 days. Personnel will be reduced from around 63,000 (including nearly 5,000 civilians) to 50,000 over the next 6 to 7 years.

■ *Navy.* In addition to its nuclear role, the navy’s modernization priorities will include new nuclear attack submarines, anti-submarine warfare frigates, deep-strike naval cruise missiles, and command and control ships. Like its army and air force counterparts, the navy is to be capable of commanding a maritime component command. Meanwhile, the navy is slated for the deepest personnel cuts—from some 55,000 (including nearly 10,000 civilians) to 44,000.

Notwithstanding pledges by Sarkozy and Defense Minister Morin, it is not certain that these capabilities targets will be met due, in large part, to resource and structural constraints. Sarkozy’s government inherited a difficult situation: to fully execute all of the defense investment programs begun by its predecessor, the investment budget would have required an injection of an additional 2 to 3 billion euros annually during 2009–2010 and 4 to 5 billion euros annually beginning in

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2011.¹⁹ This was patently impossible, given the size of the government’s deficit—at the time of the White Book’s release, the deficit was expected to reach 2.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of 2008—and political pressure to spread cutbacks across the entire government.

Sarkozy has pledged not to reduce the defense budget (36.8 billion euros in 2008, including pensions, or around 2 percent of GDP), adding that he would adjust it as necessary to keep pace with inflation. But he also has stated that his government cannot afford to increase defense spending in real terms before 2012, when he promises to begin a 1 percent annual real increase.²⁰

Morin’s far-reaching organizational reforms—to include increased outsourcing, rationalizing administrative services, and pooling top ministry and military service staffs in a new “French Pentagon” in southern Paris—are intended to reduce the “tooth to tail” imbalance, with the expected savings to be invested in new capabilities. Yet even when coupled with the projected consolidation of some 450 military installations to some 90 multirole defense bases, the promised savings from organizational reforms might be difficult to realize.

One reason is that parliamentarians and local officials, including those within

Sarkozy's political family, have warned that the base consolidation will deal a hard blow to their constituents; many will press for expensive compensation packages from the government beyond the 340 million euros in assistance promised to local governments in metropolitan France and its overseas departments and territories. Meanwhile, some defense industry experts fret that reduced equipment orders will increase unit costs, inhibit investments in leading technologies, and hurt arms exports.

An additional complicating factor: French growth and deficit projections used to calculate projected defense spending have worsened since the White Book's release. As of late August, official estimates of GDP growth for 2008 dropped from 2.25 percent to a range of 1.7 to 2 percent, with private economists predicting it will not surpass 1.3 percent. And according to press reports, the overall government deficit likely will remain close to the theoretical EU limit of 3 percent of GDP.²¹

Moreover, Sarkozy's endorsement of the White Book's recommendation to cut personnel is drawing fire, especially from within army ranks. Morin's assurance that such cuts will not degrade operational commitments in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Africa, and Lebanon reportedly has not convinced some senior military officers. Indeed, some officers privately complained of overstretch and inadequate equipment

up their defense effort to benefit their land forces, we are preparing to take the opposite course."²² Similarly, in their published critique, the anonymous officers argued against the projected downsizing of the navy and air force, even warning, "We are abandoning Europe's military leadership to the British who, everyone knows, have a special relationship with the United States. From now on, France will play in the same league as Italy."²³

Implications for the United States

The United States has important interests in the success of French defense transformation. In terms of operations, the French and American militaries cooperate today—most importantly, in Afghanistan and Kosovo—and no doubt will cooperate in the future in diverse missions, theaters, and frameworks inside and outside Europe. To do so, they must be able to communicate, exchange information, train together, offer mutual support, and, when needed, fight side by side. Extensive cooperation between the United States and France also exists in an array of nonmilitary areas important to the national security of both countries, including intelligence, counterterrorism, and emergency response to civil disasters.²⁴

Moreover, French defense and national security policies and capabilities influence, directly or indirectly, those of other key U.S. Allies and partners. Political or tactical differences between Washington and Paris periodically surface in NATO, NATO–EU relations, and operational theaters, as they do, on occasion, with other Allies. Yet overall U.S. interests are better served by a more capable, responsive, and cooperative French defense and national security structure that encourages other Europeans, through deeds as well as rhetoric, to increase their military capabilities and make them available for NATO as well as EU missions. It would be an overstatement to suggest that the U.S. route to a more capable European partner goes through Paris, notwithstanding the latter's clout in the EU. But it would be wrong to underestimate the benefits

of greater convergence between American and French approaches to defense issues.

The question for U.S. policymakers remains: Does the transformation process promised by the White Book stand a good chance of producing the desired effects? The answer depends, of course, on how the Sarkozy government executes its design. While the overall direction of the French transformation process is positive from a U.S. perspective, some aspects might be problematic and bear watching.

Greater Strategic Convergence.

The White Book's description and prioritization of future threats are similar to those found in key U.S. strategy documents. Potential linkages between international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction were acknowledged by the previous French government, but arguably with less emphasis. This is true, as well, for the treatment of Iran. French officials point out, for example, that the White Book's graphic depicting Iranian ballistic missile capabilities represents the first time that an authoritative French government publication estimates that Iranian missiles could reach most of Europe by 2015.

In this context, leading French strategists seem to have adjusted their view of the United States. Under previous governments, official statements and assessments commonly hinted at risks posed by a seemingly unconstrained or overconfident United States—a problematic “hyperpower,” according to former Socialist Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine. This is no longer the case. The White Book warns against underestimating American dynamism, but nonetheless suggests that over the next 15 years, one likely will see several changes: a relatively diminished U.S. capacity to shape global events, due in part to the rising influence of China and a more assertive Russia; a shift in American focus from Europe toward pressing crises in the Middle East and Asia; and, albeit less certain, a more inward focus among part of the American population. And leading French strategists, like many of their American counterparts, are increasingly attuned to the national security implications of growing global competition from non-Western powers

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even before Sarkozy promised, in April, to dispatch 700 soldiers to reinforce NATO in eastern Afghanistan. Thomann likely echoed their sentiments when he observed ruefully, “While our American and British friends, learning the lessons of operations for which they are paying in blood, step

for energy supplies and other raw materials as well as the effects of climate change.

The White Book's assessment of a more diverse, less predictable threat environment and, at least implicitly, a reduced U.S. global dominance buttresses its call for greater French and European investment in military and civilian capabilities across the spectrum of crisis prevention, intervention, stabilization, and reconstruction. This approach tracks closely with growing U.S. Government emphasis on the need for better coordination among all the tools of American power—including diplomatic, financial, economic, intelligence, and military tools—as well as among principal international actors (such as NATO, the EU, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations) to prevent conflict, minimize its consequences if conflict is unavoidable, and begin reconstruction as soon as possible in the postconflict phase. Hence, the perceived gap between French preference for "soft power" wherever possible and the presumed U.S. predilection for "hard power" appears to have narrowed. Pushed together by changing circumstances and lessons learned in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Paris and Washington have joined forces in support of a "Comprehensive Approach" to complex stabilization operations, even if they do not always agree on its specific modalities.

Improved Capabilities. Having encouraged the European Allies over many years to restructure their forces and defense budgets in ways that produce more deployable and interoperable capabilities to handle post–Cold War contingencies, the United States has reason to welcome the overall White Book approach. In particular, France's intention to improve its capabilities to participate in the full spectrum of military operations is good news; among the European Allies, only the United Kingdom has a comparable range of capabilities. If the White Book's targets for air forces (combat as well as transport, aerial refueling, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) and naval forces are met, France will have a substantial additional capability to conduct and sustain expeditionary operations alongside U.S. forces in an Alliance, coalition, or bilateral framework.

The effects of the proposed restructuring of land forces are less certain. The promised capabilities enhancements would improve, over time, French flexibility and effectiveness in stabilization operations such as Afghanistan. If, however, the army's military personnel bear the lion's share of the planned reductions, it is not clear that the current level of French operational commitments in

proportionately favor French industry. In addition, broader European support for French space-related programs depends, in part, on U.S. policies and practices affecting intelligence exchanges in bilateral and/or multilateral channels; such support likely will be inversely related to European perceptions of U.S. "openness" in this sensitive area.

The White Book's passing mention of missile defense indicates that there will be no near-term change in French policy to support NATO "architecture" studies of a possible Alliance-wide system while avoiding any commitment to its construction. According to French officials, their government does not oppose missile defense, which it has come to believe can complement deterrence. They add, however, that numerous technological and command and control issues (including rules of engagement) need further consideration, as do issues involving cross-border implications, such as the possible effect of debris from intercepted missiles and warheads. Some have intimated as well that the potential cost of missile defense systems is by far the major impediment to significant French investment in this area, although the White Book does call for reinforcing French missile detection and warning capabilities.

Contributions to NATO. Notwithstanding self-imposed limitations on their participation in NATO structures, the French have made important force contributions to Alliance operations, especially in the Balkans and Afghanistan, at times serving as force commander for those operations. France also has been a major contributor to the land, air, and maritime components of the NRF. In addition, France's expeditionary orientation, regional expertise (for example, in parts of Africa), and willingness to exhort fellow Europeans to meet their political commitments to improved military capabilities, multilateral cooperation, and rationalization in defense industries complement U.S. policies in many ways.

Increased French participation in Alliance structures—or, as a senior French officer has put it, ending his country's "one foot in, one foot out" status—likely would not produce any significant *short-term* boost in their troop contributions to NATO operations but likely would help the Alliance *over time*.²⁶

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areas of interest to the United States can be sustained indefinitely, much less expanded.²⁵

French plans to double annual funding for space-related programs and to seek increased EU support for such programs bear watching. The French argument that improved intelligence-gathering and communications capabilities are essential to their—and EU—decisionmaking "autonomy" is not new; nor is the implied suggestion that U.S.-supplied intelligence or other space-based data, such as the Global Positioning System, might not always be reliable or available to meet French or EU priorities. Moreover, French officials, experts, and industrial leaders make no secret of their desire to boost France's leadership role in European space efforts, and increased French government and EU funding for space-related programs of national security interest stands to produce technological spinoffs for commercial purposes.

However, other key EU players might not share French enthusiasm for large injections of funds for space-related programs ostensibly for intelligence-gathering, especially when their defense budgets are straining to meet near-term operational needs. Moreover, some EU governments already have shown impatience with French proposals—for example, within the European Defense Agency—that appear to dis-

An influx of talented French officers and non-commissioned officers into the integrated military structure would bring additional command and planning skills that stand to improve NATO performance in its increasingly demanding and complex operations.

Similarly, on the civilian side, if France were to return to its seat on the Defense Planning Committee (or a refashioned and renamed committee that fulfills essentially similar functions), it could improve the coherence of the force planning process through which NATO identifies the military requirements—in terms of national force levels, structures, readiness, and capabilities—to meet the level of ambition agreed by the Alliance political leadership and periodically reviews Allies' performance in meeting their agreed force goals.

The Alliance's transformation as a whole would benefit from a more positive and proactive French engagement. As Morin acknowledged in September 2007, "We are too often those who quibble and bargain as if we wanted to appear to prevent NATO from transforming itself."²⁷ In the coming year, NATO is expected to launch the process of reformulating a new Strategic Concept. Although U.S. and French positions might differ on specific issues likely to be covered in a new Strategic Concept, a higher French profile in NATO structures probably would give Paris a greater stake in a successful outcome.

Similarly, while French officials have not publicly floated their vision of a new headquarters and command structure, they appear sympathetic to such a realignment and reductions in NATO's military staffs. This would open the possibility of close U.S. and French cooperation with other Allies to update NATO structures in ways that improve efficiency and equitably redistribute responsibilities and burdens. And in line with the White Book analysis and Sarkozy's declarations, fuller French participation in NATO more than likely would facilitate rather than inhibit an improved NATO relationship with the EU. Indeed, French officials insist that improved NATO–EU relations are an important goal of their EU presidency.

In addition, there are two areas where an evolution in French strategic thinking, as reflected in the White Book, might open interesting possibilities affecting France's role in NATO and U.S. interests.

One possibility involves nuclear weapons issues. The White Book notes that France is the only Ally that does not participate in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), but recalls previous NATO statements recognizing that the French deterrent contributes to "the overall deterrence and security of the Allies."²⁸ Those statements, according to the White Book, "continue to be the only references as far as the relationship between [the French] deterrent force and NATO's nuclear doctrine are concerned"—a phrase intended to signal, according to some French analysts, that France would not join the NPG. At the same time, the White Book states that France proposes to conduct a "dialogue on the role of deterrence and its contribution to common security" with interested "European partners." As written, the proposal does not specify whether any such dialogue would be conducted bilaterally or multilaterally, but several EU member states (including states that, in their Alliance capacity, participate

Should French officials conclude that European political support for nuclear deterrence is under serious strain, they might reconsider the merits of joining a NATO body where nuclear issues can be discussed. This might be a renamed and restructured NPG that includes a remit on counterproliferation and missile defense policy—areas where France has keen interests. In this way, France could help sustain a European consensus on the need for a nuclear component as part of a broader NATO deterrence and defense strategy. Moreover, this could be done, in principle, without crossing any of the White Book's "red lines" regarding respect for French nuclear "independence" and "autonomy." In this regard, the United Kingdom (UK) policy on nuclear issues might be a relevant model for France, as it underscores that "decision-making and use of the [nuclear] system remains entirely sovereign to the UK [and] only the Prime Minister can authorize the use of the UK's nuclear deterrent, even if the missiles are to be fired as part of a NATO response."²⁹

A second possibility involves Africa. As the White Book makes clear, France will prefer to use the EU, wherever possible, to leverage European cooperation on African security matters. That said, EU member states have an uneven commitment to engagement in Africa, particularly involving military operations. As a former senior EU official recently wrote, "It is not only the Germans who will look for a hidden national agenda when France advocates a European intervention in Africa."³⁰ Meanwhile, the Sarkozy government appears more inclined than its predecessor to work bilaterally or in ad hoc arrangements with the United States in African security matters. Over the past year or so, for example, France has been an active participant in the U.S.-led African Partnership Station initiative to improve maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

France has been leery of any NATO involvement in Africa. However, after a rocky start in mid-2005, French officials reportedly came to appreciate NATO's role (loosely coordinated with the EU) in assisting African

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in the NPG) have made known their objection to discussing nuclear matters within an EU context.

The White Book's proposed "dialogue" might be interpreted as an acknowledgment that public support for nuclear deterrence appears to be waning in Europe, including in key French partners such as Germany. The French government probably has a strong interest in stopping any such trend, given its longstanding wariness of even rhetorical commitments to nuclear disarmament and its commitment to modernizing its deterrent.

Union peacekeepers in Darfur. More recent French frustrations with EU force generation for its current “autonomous” operation in Chad and the Central African Republic might spur Paris to reconsider the merits of improved NATO–EU coordination in African contingencies and capacity-building efforts. Among other advantages, NATO’s involvement might facilitate cooperation with the recently established U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), which, under current U.S. policy guidelines, does not coordinate directly with the EU. If the Allies were to agree on a prominent French role in African affairs within a reconfigured NATO command structure, this might be an additional incentive for Paris to improve NATO–EU cooperation in this increasingly important region. In principle, this would not foreclose the option of direct coordination between USAFRICOM and Europeans who provide concrete and valuable assistance in Africa; such an option would apply, for example, to a specific case where NATO would focus its involvement on areas where it adds value while others, such as the EU, work in a parallel and coordinated fashion to deliver comprehensive international assistance.

No Quick Fixes

When former President Jacques Chirac announced plans to downsize and professionalize the French armed forces in 1996, he encountered stiff pockets of resistance across the political spectrum and parts of the military establishment. For many, the short-term negative impacts of personnel reductions and base closures at a time of relatively high unemployment outweighed the prospects of a French military better adapted to meet post–Cold War contingencies. In retrospect, however, the Chirac reforms, while imperfect and chronically underfunded, produced a more capable and deployable force.

That Sarkozy’s more ambitious transformation agenda has had a mixed reception is hardly surprising. In some respects, the current French president faces even greater challenges than his predecessor. French operational commitments are more demanding and expensive than a decade ago. In Afghanistan,

for example, the French military in recent months has expanded its presence in regions and operations that involve more frequent and intense contact with opposing militant forces. Despite the serious losses suffered

even absent a new shock to the strategic environment, the realignment of French defense structures and investment budgets will take years

by French forces in late August, few mainstream political and opinion leaders have called for a withdrawal of troops, although worries about the nature of French participation in the International Security Assistance Force and long-term prospects for stabilizing Afghanistan are clearly mounting.³¹ Meanwhile, French peacekeeping commitments in Africa and Lebanon are not risk-free or likely to end any time soon.

Even absent a new shock to the strategic environment, the realignment of French defense structures and investment budgets will take years, in some cases, to produce appreciably greater capabilities. Meanwhile, French aspirations for a more capable and ambitious EU defense dimension will depend on parallel engagement by their major European partners. It is premature to judge whether the French EU presidency will produce hard-and-fast commitments to boost near-term military capabilities in critical areas, but relatively low (and, in some cases, declining) European defense budgets do not bode well for dramatic progress. Moreover, French officials might find it harder to rally EU members to do more if their own defense establishment is perceived as “hitting the wall.”

The United States, for its part, can play a positive but limited role in French defense transformation. Increased military-to-military contacts in the context of operations (as in eastern Afghanistan), training exercises, and

concept development are helpful in promoting better bilateral—and, in turn, Alliance-wide—interoperability. High-level U.S. statements of support for EU defense capabilities, an expanded French role in NATO structures, and a complementary NATO–EU relationship have helped Sarkozy handle domestic critics; their judicious repetition during the U.S. Presidential transition would improve chances of a “win-win” outcome at the NATO Summit in April 2009. (Such statements are welcomed, as well, by many European officials anxious to see greater French participation in NATO.) In addition, a visible and credible U.S. commitment to a two-way street in transatlantic defense industrial trade and technology flows would counterbalance those in France and elsewhere in Europe who favor defense cooperation programs within the EU that could disadvantage U.S. competitors.

In the end, however, France’s defense transformation fundamentally depends on a sustained national commitment, in political support and necessary resources, to the goals set by Sarkozy and the White Book. In presenting the White Book, the French president acknowledged that protests and demonstrations likely will ensue but insisted that his government would stay the course. France’s Allies will be watching closely to see if it does.

Notes

¹ “*Livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale*,” June 17, 2008. All references to the “*Livre blanc*” (White Book) are drawn from the integral French version available at <www.defense.gouv.fr/livre blanc/les conclusions_1/le_livre blanc_1_integrale/le_livre blanc_1_integrale_1>.

² “Speech of the President of the Republic on Defense and National Security,” June 17, 2008, available at <www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=cv&press_id=1568&cat_id=7&lang=fr>.

³ “Surcouf,” “*Livre blanc sur la défense: une espérance déçue*,” *Le Figaro*, June 18, 2008; see also, “*Le scud d’Alain Juppé contre la politique de défense de Nicolas Sarkozy*,” *Le Monde*, June 19, 2008.

⁴ White Book, 336. This Strategic Forum focuses on defense issues. The Sarkozy government also is overhauling governmental structures to improve intelligence, crisis management, and coordination among defense and domestic security ministries and agencies, and several of these reforms are recommended in the White Book.

⁵ “Speech of the President of the Republic.”

⁶ White Book, 39.

⁷ Ibid., 69–70. Sarkozy perhaps never intended the White Book commission to reexamine fundamental questions

related to French nuclear weapons. He pointedly noted, in an August 2007 speech to commission members, that “dissuasion remains an absolute imperative on which I already have clearly pronounced [my views].” Available at <www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=cview&press_id=262&cat_id=7&lang=fr>.

In a March 2008 speech in Cherbourg, Sarkozy underscored his personal authority over the nuclear dossier by outlining his views on deterrent strategy, announcing a cutback in fixed-wing nuclear delivery capabilities, and proposing modest additional steps related to nuclear nonproliferation and arms reductions. Available at <www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=cview&press_id=1203&cat_id=7&lang=fr>.

⁸ Under the “Vigipirate” plan launched in 1995, some 1,000 military personnel would be available for ground operations inside France in the event of a “red alert” of serious and multiple attacks. See French Defense Staff Web site, available at <www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/enjeux_defense/missions_interieures/vigipirate/vigipirate>.

⁹ Ibid., White Book, 221–222. In May 2008, Sarkozy announced he would delay, until 2011–2012, his decision on whether to construct a second aircraft carrier.

¹⁰ Statement by Bernard Kouchner to EU presidency seminar on NATO–EU relations, July 2, 2008, available at <www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france_830/onu-organisations-internationales_1032/organisations-internationales-europe_1126/otan_1134/seminaire-haut-niveau-ue-otan-7-juillet-2008_19024/discours-m-bernard-kouchner_64303.html>.

In his remarks, Kouchner said that over the next decade the EU should be capable of *simultaneously* (emphasis added) conducting two large stabilization operations of up to 10,000 military personnel each, for at least 2 years, with a civilian component for reconstruction work; two rapid reaction operations for a limited duration, using the 1,500-man EU battlegroups; an emergency evacuation operation for EU citizens; an air or maritime interdiction operation; a civil-military humanitarian assistance mission lasting 90 days; and around 10 civilian police and justice missions. The first two categories alone would involve up to 23,000 troops—approximately four times the number of troops engaged in ESDP operations (in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chad, and the Central African Republic) as of August 2008.

¹¹ For Henri Bentégeat’s statement, see his interview with *Europolitics*, December 14, 2007. For Jean-Louis Georgelin’s, see his speech to French parliamentary conference “Peace and Defense” on May 14, 2008, available at <www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/layout/set/print/content/view/full/127539>.

¹² For further background and figures on French military presence in NATO structures, see Leo G. Michel, “Getting to Oui,” in *International Politik* (Global Edition), May 2008, and “NATO’s ‘French Connection’: *Plus ça change?*” Institute for National Strategic Studies monograph, April 13, 2007. Both available at <www.ndu.edu/ins>.

¹³ “Speech of the President of the Republic.”

¹⁴ In addition to the 21 EU members that belong to NATO, 5 EU members—Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta, and Sweden—are members of Partnership for Peace and (except for Malta) participate, to varying degrees, in NATO-led operations and other military activities.

¹⁵ Statement by Benoit d’Aboville before the National Assembly Commission on National Defense and Armed Forces, June 3, 2008, available at <www.assembleenationale.fr/13/cr-cdef/07-08/c0708031.asp>.

¹⁶ Statement at Bucharest Summit, April 3, 2008, available at <www.elysee.fr/documents/index.php?mode=cview&press_id=1243&cat_id=7&lang=fr>.

¹⁷ Jean-Claude Thomann, “*Ménace sur notre capacité militaire*,” *Le Monde*, May 13, 2008.

¹⁸ See White Book, 210; and Hervé Morin, “*Prenons une défense d’avance*,” *Le Monde*, June 17, 2008. Morin compared the French performance with the United Kingdom, which he asserted has a 40:60 ratio of administrative and support personnel to operational personnel.

¹⁹ Statement by Morin before the National Assembly Commission on National Defense and Armed Forces, April 15, 2008, available at <www.assembleenationale.fr/13/cr-cdef/07-08/c070803.asp>.

²⁰ “Speech of the President of the Republic.” The White Book uses the 36.8 billion euros figure (p. 289), including 6.7 billion euros in pensions. The overall defense ministry budget, including gendarmerie costs and pensions, approximates 44 billion euros, but most of the gendarmerie force is devoted to domestic security missions. Although Sarkozy and Morin have used the 2 percent of GDP figure to describe the French defense effort, the figure would be closer to 1.7 percent if pensions and most of the gendarmerie figure were excluded. Authoritative French Defense Ministry figures on defense expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product (using NATO and non-NATO definitions) are found in the *Annuaire statistique de la défense 2007/2008*, available at <www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/content/download/121455/1062606/file/annuire_stat_2008_chap5.pdf>.

²¹ “*Endettée et peu compétitive, la France n'a guère de marge de manœuvre face au ralentissement de l'activité*,” *Le Monde*, August 18, 2008.

²² Thomann, “*Ménace sur notre capacité militaire*.”

²³ “Surcouf,” “*Livre blanc sur la défense: une espérance déçue*.”

²⁴ See, for example, Dana Priest, “Help from France Key in Covert Operations,” *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2005.

²⁵ According to Morin, his ministry downsized by 6,000 employees in 2008 by replacing only a part of departing personnel; of these, 5,000 were military and 1,000 were civilians. If the same ratio were applied to the proposed army reductions of some 26,000, the total number of active duty soldiers will drop from some 120,000 to around 100,000—or only 12,000 above the planned “operations” pool of 88,000. While defense ministry officials claim that the reductions of uniformed soldiers will affect only “back office” personnel, some French defense experts point out that logistics and administrative functions performed by soldiers—as opposed to civilian functionaries or contractors—are relevant to operational needs.

²⁶ Interview with Bentégeat, *Le Figaro*, September 26, 2007.

²⁷ Speech by Morin at Toulouse Summer Defense Conference, September 11, 2007, available at <www.defense.gouv.fr/ministre/prises_de_parole/discours/discours_de_m_herve_morin_ministre_de_la_defense_toulouse_le_11_septembre_2007>.

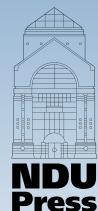
²⁸ See “The Alliance’s Strategic Concept,” April 1999, available at <www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>. See also “The Ottawa Declaration,” June 1974, available at <www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/b740619a.htm>.

²⁹ Ministry of Defence, “The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent: Defence White Paper 2006,” available at <www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublicationsPolicyStrategyandPlanning/HeFutureofTheUnitedKingdomsNuclearDeterrentDefenceWhitePaper2006cm6994.htm>.

³⁰ Nick Witney, “Re-energising Europe’s Security and Defence Policy,” European Council on Foreign Relations, July 29, 2008, available at <www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/european_security_and_defence_policy>.

³¹ The French suffered 10 deaths and 21 wounded in combat on August 20, 2008—the bloodiest day for the army since 9 soldiers were killed and some 30 wounded in the bombing of Bouaké (Côte d’Ivoire) in November 2004. Before the recent incident, France had lost a total of 14 soldiers in Afghanistan since 2001.

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